

Bob Bischoff

State Representative • District 68

2000 Session of the Indiana General Assembly

Legislature allocates tobacco settlement funds

Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.



Rep. Bischoff presides over the House in his role as Speaker Emeritus

Settlement will help rural Indiana, farmers

The national tobacco settlement legislation approved this session provides a framework to help rural Indiana and farmers who grow the product. While no money was appropriated to help in these two areas, the final bill does create a fund that eventually will dedicate assistance to areas of the state that will suffer economically through the loss of tobacco production.

Funding for the Tobacco Farmers and Rural Community Impact Fund will be used to help transition tobacco farmers into crops other than tobacco. Funding will also be used to develop new agricultural enterprises in those cities and towns, including facilities for research and development, new market opportunities, educational and leadership development programs and direct financial assistance. These efforts are steps toward preserving and maintaining Indiana family farms and farmland.

Senior citizens will also see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.

New law will establish IHSAA review panel

The General Assembly addressed parent concerns about the Indiana High School Athletic Association through legislation that creates a panel to review appeals of rulings made by the IHSAA.

The panel will consist of parents, high school principals and athletic directors. Issues that they will rule on include the eligibility of student athletes. In the past, appeals of IHSAA decisions often led to lengthy, expensive court fights. Now, the panel will address appeals and save students and parents time and money.

Two Bischoff bills become law

River boat revenues -- Legislation was approved that would impact the distribution of river boat revenues.

House Bill 1157, which I authored, will give local governments the authority to donate river boat gaming revenue to charitable nonprofit organizations and schools. The organizations and schools will disperse the funds however they see fit, as long as they agree to certain stipulations.

However, they would be required to return the donation should the organization lose its status as a charitable organization or is liquidated.

State fair -- I also authored legislation that will require the state fair advisory committee to oversee the activities and affairs of the trustees of the center for agricultural science and heritage.

Medicaid disability requirements eased

Medicaid -- Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Medicaid was designed to help needy individuals, but the current system excludes so many from qualifying for the aid that most other states would offer them.

Helping working men and women

New legislation addresses disability, unemployment

Legislators have approved measures that will make substantial changes in coverage for workers who are injured on the job and improve benefits for those people who have lost their jobs.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum



Rep. Bischoff with Gov. O'Bannon.

benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.

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State legislative web site offers variety of information

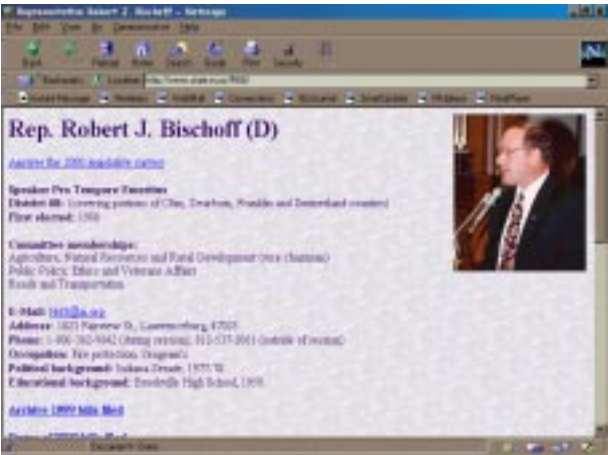
The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at www.state.in.us/R68 and explore various items related to the legislature.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women’s health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year’s legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 1-800-382-9842.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Top Five State Web Sites*

- 1. State Job Bank
- 2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
- 3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
- 4. General Assembly homepage
- 5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage

*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000

Inventory tax cuts greater than expected

Inventory tax cuts enacted by members of the Indiana General Assembly will provide more relief than originally anticipated for farm and small business owners across the state.

When we passed these cuts during the 1999 legislative session, savings were estimated at more than \$80 million in both 2000 and 2001. Now it appears those estimates were low, and the actual savings will be more than \$210 million in both years. This news means that many Hoosiers will see even smaller tax bills in the years ahead.

In the 1999 session, legislators approved a plan that provided a credit for property taxes paid on the first \$12,500 of assessed valuation on personal property, including inventory, mobile homes, and farm and manufacturing equipment.

By enacting this credit and assuring that it covers both equipment and inventory, we eliminated inventory taxes for nearly 90 percent of the businesses and farms in Indiana. The inventory tax cut is just one part of what is now more than \$1.5 billion in tax relief for the people of Indiana that has been put into place over the past few years.

Other reductions approved during that time provide a new income tax deduction for homeowners that covers up to \$2,500 in property taxes, raise the exemption for dependent children from \$1,000 to \$2,500, increase the renter’s deduction from \$1,500 to \$2,000, eliminate the property tax add-back for farmers and small businesses and put two breaks in place that benefit senior citizens: raising the income tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and the property tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Census 2000

Census 2000 in the State of Indiana means that millions of dollars in federal funding and a congressional seat are at stake. Indiana's population is estimated to be around 6 million -- up from 5.5 million in 1990 (the last official U.S. Bureau of Census count).

You already should have received your questionnaire in the mail. The results will be used to determine things like federal highway money and whether or not Indiana will retain all ten of its U.S. House of Representatives districts.

There will be two forms. Nationwide, five out of six households will receive the short form which will ask questions about your name, sex, age, relationship to others in your household, Hispanic origin, race and whether your home is owned or rented. A longer form will be mailed to the remaining households, asking questions about education, ancestry, employment, disability and others.

The Census Bureau cannot share your information with others according to the law. This includes Immigration and Naturalization Services, welfare services, Internal Revenue Service, police, courts and the military.